

# EXAMINATION OF CONTROVERSY

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LET us begin with a story told by Matthew Arnold.<sup>1</sup> "I remember a Nonconformist manufacturer of a town in the Midlands telling me that when he first came there some years ago, the place had no Dissenters; but he had opened an Independent Chapel in it, and now Church and Dissent were pretty equally divided, with sharp contests between them. I said that seemed a pity. 'A pity?' cried he. 'Not at all! Only think of all the zeal and activity which the contest calls forth!' 'Ah, but, my dear friend', I answered, 'only think of all the nonsense which you now hold quite firmly, which you would never have held if you had not been contradicting your adversary all these years!'" That it seems is a story with a moral. It suggests that there are two, at least two, possible attitudes towards controversy—the attitude which regards it as good and fruitful, and the attitude which regrets that much of the fruit is not good.

Here then is the question which we are to examine—What is the nature of controversy? How far is it a good thing? If it is a good thing, what are its consequences and how far should it be practised for the sake of these consequences? If it is a bad thing, what are its evil results, and how carefully should it be avoided? But, we may ask, can it be avoided? If it is an essential constituent of all discussion and progress, need we go any further? The answer seems to be that, even if it cannot be avoided, there may be conditions which will diminish evil results and make it more profitable. We shall then consider first, the inevitability of controversy; second, the worse side; third, the better side; and then the conditions of useful controversy.

## I

**The inevitability of controversy.** I use the word 'inevitability' rather than 'necessity', which might have seemed simpler. But necessity would be more difficult to establish, calling perhaps for a more philosophical approach. However, let us look first at the witness of history. So far as we can see, there is controversy all along the line. It existed in pre-Christian times. The Dialogues of Plato are a brilliant and fascinating witness to it. In the Old Testament it appears in the arguments between prophet and

<sup>1</sup> Qtd. *Times Literary Supplement*. 3 Feb., 1949.

priest, or between Jeremiah and the rulers of his day. And in the earliest years of the Christian Church we have the trouble about the admission of the Gentiles to the Church, and St. Paul's claim that he withstood St. Peter to his face, which suggests sharp exchanges. And there is not a century in the Church's history that does not witness to the same thing—the Christological controversies in the early centuries; the quarrels between East and West over the procession of the Holy Spirit; the problems raised at the period of the Reformation; and those in Scotland itself since the Reformation right down to our own days. How few are the decades without some subject for argument!

It does seem that controversy is inevitable, and this conclusion has been accepted by many writers. Thus, A. C. Headlam, writing to his father in connection with the *Lux Mundi* troubles, said, "I do not think there is anything excited or unhealthy about the controversy. As long as religious life is healthy and real, there must be always controversies; for new questions arise to be settled."<sup>1</sup> There you have the governing cause—that "new questions arise to be settled". As knowledge grows from more to more, continually differences of opinion arise, and it is very rarely that new knowledge is universally accepted right away. It is indeed difficult to think of any new discovery in science, or any new attitude to religion or the Bible, or any new proposal as to the policy of the Church, that has been accepted without demur. We may then take it that controversy is, so far as we can see, an inevitable accompaniment to the progress of thought and of religion.

## II

**The worse side of controversy.** J. S. Whale has said,<sup>2</sup> "Strifes, divisions, heresy-charges, schisms, excommunications, exilings, crusades against 'heretics' or 'schismatics', reformations without tarrying for any, whole-sale massacre, the axe, the rack, the stake—all this has been the recurrent feature of a story that has been glorious and wonderful in other respects". "All this" was associated with controversy, and most of it was the result of controversy. It is not surprising therefore that many writers have condemned controversy outright as an evil thing. T. S. Eliot in his *Use of Poetry*<sup>3</sup> speaks of controversy as "systematised misunderstanding". And again in his *After Strange Gods*, says, "In our time controversy seems to me, on really fundamental matters, to be futile". A. L. Rowse in *The England of Elizabeth*<sup>4</sup> writes of "the sterile and stultifying conflicts of doctrine and theory, of what men think that they think", and adds,

<sup>1</sup> *A.C.H.*, by Ronald Jasper. p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *The Protestant Idea*, p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> p. 387.

"The sixteenth century is full of the endless fooleries of disputes about doctrine, even more senseless—since they were largely over things by definition unknowable—than the theories of Marxism in our time". Rowse is of course somewhat prejudiced against religion, but many others would tend to agree that controversy has this bad side.

One reason, it seems, is that controversy tends to drive people to extremes. When argument begins, there may be no more than a slight difference of view, but as the argument goes on, the tendency is to harden and to increase the difference, and in the end the two sides dig themselves in and remain in a narrow entrenched position from which dislodgement becomes more and more difficult. As G. D. Yarnold says in *The Bread Which We Break*,<sup>1</sup> "What began far enough back in history as mere differences of emphasis or complementary aspects of the truth, have been twisted, over-defined, dogmatically asserted or denied, till they have become permanent matters of acrimonious debate among Christians". The consequence is often extreme bitterness, which especially in Christian circles is a most unhappy and unedifying spectacle.

Yet even in the early Church we have strange examples of this. You may remember Tertullian's venomous attacks on Marcion. "Nothing however in Pontus is so barbarous and sad as the fact that Marcion was born there, fouler than any Scythian, more inhuman than the Massagete, more audacious than an Amazon . . . more savage than even the beasts of that barbarous region."<sup>2</sup> Even Jerome in spite of his great service to the Church and his undoubted sincerity and faith could enter into controversy with plentiful supplies of invective. Rufinus, once his friend, was foolish enough to suggest that Jerome had shown some admiration for Origen, and was assailed in one place<sup>3</sup> as 'Grunnus Corocotta Porcellus', i. e. Grunter, Hog, Pig, and in another<sup>4</sup> as 'the scorpion, a dumb and poisonous brute'. In Epistle cxxv to Rusticus, he said, "When the Grunter wished to speak, he used to come forward at a snail's pace . . . Then he would pour forth a torrent of nonsense and declaim vehemently against everyone . . . At home he was a monster like Nero, abroad a paragon like Cato . . . You would say he was formed of jarring elements like that unnatural and unheard-of monster (the Chimaera)", and incidentally this last tirade appears in a section which begins, "Never speak evil of anyone or suppose that you make yourself better by assailing the reputations of others".

If we pass to the Scottish Church, we find many illustrations of this same process. We are indeed reputed to be particularly prone to contro-

<sup>1</sup> p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Pref. in Jerem.*

<sup>3</sup> *Con, Marcion.* Book I, ch. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *In Isa.* Bk. 10.



versy, and G. D. Henderson has suggested<sup>1</sup> that this proneness may have been due to the training given to students in disputations in which "sympathetic appreciation of an opponent's position was not thought of." Look at the Marrow controversy of the early eighteenth century, where the continuance of argument developed into bad feeling and mutual recrimination. Joseph Caryl said of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* that it was "composed in a familiar, plain and moderate style, without bitterness against or uncomely reflections upon others; which flies have lately corrupted many boxes of (otherwise precious) ointment". At first the argument was free from rancour, but as time went on matters grew much worse. This was due not only to an increasing warmth in the argument, but also to the treatment meted out to those known to be in sympathy with the Marrow principles—they were passed over in presentations to parishes; they were not elected as commissioners to the General Assembly, and so on. That way of dealing naturally only increased exacerbation and bitterness.

The Apocrypha controversy was even more extreme in argument. The British and Foreign Bible Society was constituted in 1804 by protestants for printing and circulating Holy Scripture "without note or comment", and as the Apocrypha was not regarded as being in the canon of Scripture, it was to be omitted. But the Society began to print the Apocrypha in the belief that if their edition included the Apocrypha, it would be more likely to gain entry into places where the Apocrypha was already honoured, e.g. into the Roman Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church and elsewhere. Was it not better that the Bible with the Apocrypha should find entrance among these people than that it should not enter at all? But this new printing awakened intense opposition especially in Scotland, and many pamphlets were published in the argument. Robert Haldane for instance wrote at least fifteen pamphlets against what he called "that dreadful abomination the Apocrypha". The religious papers took the matter up and many of the articles on both sides did not mince matters. The *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* in 1826 castigated a writer in the *Eclectic Review* as "this half-bred theologian and most miserable guide of public opinion"<sup>2</sup> and said of an article in the same Review, "It overflows with the grossest scurrility that ever polluted a literary journal"<sup>3</sup>. Actually the question at issue moved away from the Apocrypha to the directors of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and personal attacks were rampant. In the end the controversy died down, partly perhaps because matters of greater moment claimed attention.

<sup>1</sup> *Religious Life in XVII Century Scotland*. p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> p. 313.      <sup>3</sup> p. 662.

These examples remind us of what has happened so frequently. Can we analyse this a little more in detail? For one thing, we may say that arguments go to extremes often because the protagonist on one side ignores some part of the opponent's argument, concentrating perhaps on one point to the exclusion of others. That can easily happen when a document of some length is concerned, detailing a number of conditions or of articles. The whole document is denounced because of one point of disagreement or because of a few such points although a dozen other points are agreeable to all. That is, contestants often ignore part of the truth. On the question of the polity of the Church, for example, there have been claims that presbytery on the one hand and episcopacy on the other can be derived from the teaching of the New Testament. In the argument, the next stage is the assertion of the divine right of presbytery on the one hand and of episcopacy on the other. It may be pointed out that none of the Reformers claimed a divine right for either. Knox did not, and the Scots Confession did not. Only when Melville came down on the side of presbytery did the question become more urgent. He was challenged by Bancroft who put forward the idea of a divine right for episcopacy. As the argument proceeded the protagonists went more and more to extremes, with in Scotland an eventual splitting of the fabric of the Church. And all this with an eye too often blind to the fact that both presbytery and bishops are mentioned in the New Testament, to the fact that neither presbytery nor episcopacy appears there as a system, and to the theological argument of the New Testament for the Church as one Body, the Body of Christ.

Not only has the Church been split by secession and disruption, but some re-unions of the Church in Scotland have been violently opposed, chiefly because of one or two points of disagreement, while the great benefits otherwise made possible are ignored. The Uniting Act of 1900 between the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church would have been agreed upon by all except for one or two points, the questions of voluntaryism and of the Declaratory Acts. And the Uniting Act of 1929 was almost completely acceptable apart from the question of the state connection and the teinds, the proposed solution to which was unacceptable to a few. Canon Raven seems to have been justified in his statement<sup>1</sup> that "exaggeration of points of protest often leads to the rejection of much that is vital in tradition, and to a self-conscious exclusiveness which easily leads to pharisaism".

This of course is partly due to the intransigence of the debater. He will not see any good in the other side, or at least he lays all the emphasis

<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel and the Church*. p. 16.

on what he considers to be bad—and he will not change. R. M. Hare has put forward a parable on this point in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*.<sup>1</sup> "A certain lunatic is convinced that all dons want to murder him. His friends introduce him to all the mildest and most respectable dons they can find, and after each of them has retired, they say, 'You see he doesn't really want to murder you. He spoke to you in a most cordial manner; surely you are convinced now'. But the lunatic replies, 'Yes, but that was only his diabolical cunning; he's really plotting against me the whole time, like the rest of them; I know it, I tell you'. However many kindly dons are produced, the reaction is still the same". In many controversies there are contestants like that, who simply will not be convinced. For them the point at issue has been solved and their minds are closed. For them new light may be only darkness. You find this in the pamphleteering controversies during the Westminster Assembly period, in the early eighteenth century as between episcopacy and presbytery, in the nineteenth century in respect of the Ten Years' Conflict, as well as in those already mentioned.

To go a step further, this is sometimes due to the fact that the debater just does not understand his opponent's argument. Gerald Manley Hopkins in one of his letters<sup>2</sup> said that in controversial matters he was alive to the fact that "strong persuasion is nothing when you do not know what is really said by the other side". Again, G. M. Trevelyan in his *Recreations of an Historian*<sup>3</sup> wrote, "The study of past controversies of which the final outcome is known, destroys the spirit of prejudice. It brings home to the mind the evils that are likely to spring from violent policy, based on want of understanding of opponents". Mr. H. M. Paton underlined this idea in the paper recently given to this Society.<sup>4</sup> "If the Seceders had read some of the pamphlets to see both sides of a question instead of denouncing them because of the authors, much trouble and provocation would have been avoided."

Another thing is that words are often used in different senses by opponents. As T. S. Eliot puts it in *Four Quarters*,

Words strain,  
Crack, and sometimes break, under the burden.

While it is important that the meanings of words should be carefully considered, it is admittedly sometimes very difficult to be sure about this.

<sup>1</sup> p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> *Further Letters*. XLVIII.

<sup>3</sup> p. 28f.

<sup>4</sup> 'Some Secession Pamphlets' in the *Records* of the Society. Vol. XIII, p. 157.



G. K. Chesterton in his little book on G. F. Watts<sup>1</sup> says, "Every time one man says to another, 'Tell us plainly what you mean', he is assuming the infallibility of language; that is to say, he is assuming that there is a perfect scheme of verbal expression for all the internal moods and meanings of men. Whenever a man says to another, 'Prove your case; defend your faith', he is assuming the infallibility of language . . . He knows that there are in the soul tints more bewildering, more numberless and more nameless than the colours of an autumn forest . . . Yet he seriously believes that these things can every one of them, in all their tones and semi-tones, in all their blends and unions, be accurately represented by an arbitrary system of grunts and squeals". Chesterton of course had a much higher view of language than that description of human speech suggests. But he was right about the difficulty of clear definition and precise explanation, and certainly in argumentation words should be as clearly as possible defined and explained.

This point has special force where there must be definition of theological ideas. Such definition is always difficult, as is seen for example, in the discussion of such doctrines as those of the Atonement, predestination, justification, and so on. For each of these doctrines there have been many definitions, and seldom has a new statement of any of them been freely accepted. We have been reminded in this Society recently of the work of John McLeod Campbell, and of the troubles he had to face after the publication of his work on the Atonement

Or again, Professor Simson was charged in the second case against him with "disobeying the former order of the court (i.e. the General Assembly) against employing terms and hypotheses out of harmony with the form of sound words". And of course the definition of the form of sound words was seriously involved.

Indeed many of the heresy hunts in our Scottish history have been due to the existence of different explanations of the same doctrine, which have been regarded by their respective adherents as the final word, but which have very frequently been found to be inadequate to the whole truth.

The question of the inspiration of the Bible and all the controversy over biblical accuracy and interpretation which was strongly argued last century both in England and in Scotland is perhaps a case in point. In both countries the attitude which caused the difficulty was due to the new continental ideas about the Bible. In England it was *Essays and Reviews* that set off the spark, and Colenso's book on the Pentateuch fanned the flame. In Scotland it was William Robertson Smith's article

<sup>1</sup> p. 88f.

on the Bible in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* published in 1875 that started the trouble. There were repercussions in the cases of Marcus Dods and A. B. Davidson brought before the General Assembly of the Free Church. The course of the trouble is well-known and need not be detailed here. But we should note that the words 'Higher Criticism' were bandied about and became for many who were not properly informed an object of fear and hate. Many of those who argued furiously about the subject did not really understand the implications of the phrase. For them it meant something vague and yet dangerous and detestable, something which they thought would destroy the faith and ruin the Church. Much of the argument turned upon the meaning of the inspiration of the Bible. The word was used in different senses. Some thought of it as verbal inspiration—every word dictated by the divine word. Others thought of it more broadly as an inspiration not in the letter but in the spirit. And in the arguments themselves the distinction was not always kept clear. When appeal was made to the Westminster Confession of Faith, it was forgotten that when the Confession was prepared there was no thought of this type of controversy at all. Controversy there was indeed, but most people had much the same opinion about the inspiration of the Bible. The atmosphere in the seventeenth century was really quite different from that in the nineteenth, and it is little wonder that many people began to feel that some statements in the Confession required to be revised. And that of course led to another controversy. Here then we have cases where different meanings of words and different statements of doctrines tended to make controversy more violent.

But perhaps we have said enough about this side of controversy. It is clear that it can lead to great trouble and much narrow-mindedness, much bitterness and suffering, under certain circumstances.

### III

So let us now look at **the better side of controversy**. We came to the conclusion earlier that controversy is probably inevitable. We must come to the further conclusion that though it has its bad qualities and results, it can also bear good fruit. David Daiches in his *Study of Literature*<sup>1</sup> suggests that controversy on fundamentals may help "to bring first principles to light and keep them in the light". One may suppose that if there is a long spell without controversy, people may grow neglectful of first principles or may lose interest in fundamental truths. These may not be altogether forgotten or completely ignored, but they can readily be pushed to one side. But when controversy is stirred up, the principle or

<sup>1</sup> p. 19.



truth concerned is brought to the front, and is examined anew and its value reassessed. To quote H. M. Paton again—and this is the other side of his opinion formerly noted—"I am convinced that the circulation of these (Secession) pamphlets stirred the minds and hearts of many persons in various ranks of society, keeping before them spiritual and moral issues, helping to keep their religion alive and encouraging the serious reader to dip into the Old Book and examine fundamentals, the foundation of his faith".<sup>1</sup>

That is true of most of the pamphleteering warfares of the Scottish Church. On both sides the pamphlets were meant to stand for truth, to press truth upon their readers. Each side believed its own premises to be true, and usually that those of their opponents were false. And on this account we often find a complete or nearly complete absence of toleration. This must seem to us a bad thing, but it was not so to the controversialists of, say, the seventeenth century. To them toleration was an evil thing; and you may remember James Durham's remark<sup>2</sup>—"Toleration doth either account little of error, as being no hurtful thing, and so there can be no esteem of truth: or it doth account little of the destruction of souls; both which must be abominable". That attitude may be less common in our time, although in days of acute controversy there is less toleration.

But surely this brings us to the idea expressed somewhere by William Temple that behind every strongly-held position there is some truth to be extricated and cherished. That is quite contrary to the ideas of the Covenanters, who were more inclined to see things in black and white. Indeed perhaps they had to take that attitude, for, as G. D. Henderson has pointed out,<sup>3</sup> "Moderate views are seldom effective as propaganda". Nevertheless Temple's view seems to be justified at least in a great majority of cases. It is seldom that one side in an argument is absolutely right and the other absolutely wrong. The contestants will doubt that, yet when the noise of battle has died away and the controversy is over, it is very frequently found that there was in fact something to be said for both sides. Dr. W. D. Maxwell in an article on the Book of Common Prayer and the Reformed Churches in the *Hibbert Journal*<sup>4</sup> wrote in this strain—"We are beginning to see that much in the old controversies was not, properly speaking, contradictory but complementary, and that we enter into the true richness of our heritage when we accept gratefully the best gifts from both traditions (i.e. the Evangelical Movement and the Oxford Movement) and offer them back to God in praise and prayer, in the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Lord's Supper".

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit. p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> *A Treatise concerning Scandal*, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit. p. 253.n. 173.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. xlvii. p. 326.

In this connection one may quote Leonard Hodgson's story in his *Church and Sacraments in Divided Christendom*,<sup>1</sup> where he refers to a discussion in New York on the Sacrament of Holy Communion. "A good Presbyterian there was explaining what he meant by calling the service a memorial, and a member of the American branch of the Cowley Fathers, a very Catholic Anglican, was explaining what he meant by calling it a sacrifice. When they had finished, first the Presbyterian said, 'Is that really what you mean by sacrifice?', and the Cowley Father said, 'Do you really mean all that by memorial?' They shook hands on it and said they were really meaning the same thing in different language". They were in fact looking at the one thing from different angles, with complementary results. And there is little doubt that the present generation of theologians discussing these problems connected with the Eucharist—the Real Presence, Sacrifice, Commemoration—are beginning to understand each other better and are coming nearer to one another, and learning indeed how much truth there has been on both sides. As Yarnold says in the book already quoted,<sup>2</sup> so far as these things are concerned "it is essential that we should get behind the medieval and reformation periods; and seek to recover something of the wholeness of primitive belief, without the embarrassment of over-definition".

If then it is correct to say that there is truth on both sides, what is the ultimate end of controversy? If one side alone wins the argument, the result will be the neglect or loss of whatever truth is on the other side, and in consequence a certain loss of balance or impoverishment. This is evident in those controversies which have ended in schism, secession or disruption. It will be generally agreed that whatever arguments may be brought forward in favour of the idea that these were necessary at the time, even to preserve or to underline some neglected truth—it will be generally agreed that other results which ensued were harmful to the cause of religion. Each of these schisms led to much bitterness and bad feeling, which lasted for many years and hampered the evangelical witness in Scotland. Churches and manses were duplicated where the population was far too small for them, leaving a sad heritage of difficulty and, even yet on occasion, of dissension. Yet on the other hand, the passing of time has in so many cases brought a solution to the old conflicts. The various reunions that have brought together so many parts of our fissiparous Presbyterianism show that the solution comes about not so much by way of compromise but rather by way of an inclusive accommodation. It is not so much that this or that has been given up for the sake of unity, but rather that this and that have become better understood, understood in

<sup>1</sup> p. 21.<sup>2</sup> p. 91.

a deeper, more spiritual, more Christian way. The Union of 1929 is an outstanding example of this, for it brought together Christians of very different traditions—even if the process of time had already to some extent drawn the traditions nearer to each other. And it has proved to be so happily inclusive of traditions that the Original Secession Church felt able the other year to join its forces and its witness with those of the Church of Scotland.

We may remember that this inclusive accommodation had been attempted, unfortunately without success, more than once in the past. Perhaps the attitude of the "Aberdeen Doctors" was out of time. Feelings ran too strong for their teaching to take hold. But it is worth recalling that the general attitude which they took up on most questions of the day—on theological problems, on questions of worship and on church government—was one of moderation. Dr. Macmillan's view as expressed in his lectures on these men, seems to be wholly justified. They "endeavoured to go beneath the differences, and to unite the opposing factions in a true unity. This (they) did not by shutting (their) eyes to the difficulties that produced contention, but by going beneath them and seeing the true ground of their origin and at the same time of their reconciliation."<sup>1</sup> G. D. Henderson too speaks<sup>2</sup> of "the admirably restrained and moderate and Catholic utterances of the Doctors."

This general attitude, though rare, was not altogether absent in later years. The great Bishop Robert Leighton probably derived some of his attitude from the Doctors, though it seems to have been natural to him. His sermon before the Commissioners and Parliament in Edinburgh on 14th November, 1669 included these words: "If I had one of the loudest as I have one of the lowest voices, yea, were it as loud as a trumpet, I would employ it to sound a retreat to all our unnatural and irreligious debates about religion, and to persuade men to follow the meek and lowly Jesus. There is a great abatement of the inwards of religion, when the debates about it pass to a scurf outside, and nothing is to be found within but a consuming fever of contention which tendeth to utter ruin."<sup>3</sup>

Leighton's well-known plan of accommodation was quite unsuccessful, for the Covenanters hated any suggestion of Erastianism, and the Episcopalians thought it conceded too much. Nevertheless his plan may still be of some influence and value, for the problems he faced are still with us. We might aim, as he did, at what these lines of Robert Bridges suggest—

Responsive rivalries, that, while they strove,  
Combined in full harmonious suspense.

<sup>1</sup> *The Aberdeen Doctors*. p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Qtd. by D. Butler. *Life of R. L.* pp. 420-1.



## IV

If this is the way in which controversy may lead to good results, what conditions should it necessarily fulfil? The answer has been implied in much that we have said. For example, controversies that arise in the Christian Church ought to be conducted on Christian principles. The bad temper, the objurgations, the intolerance, the personalities, which have so often marred arguments, should be altogether avoided. Criticism should be fair and just, attacking not a false or partial idea of the opponent's views, but facing up squarely to his arguments, however unpalatable they may be. The controversialist ought to think out his own position, with all its implications, so far as he can, before going ahead. Too often he leaps into the fray before really looking. A. O. J. Cockshot<sup>1</sup> speaking of the Tractarian-Evangelical controversy points out that many within the Church "revealed themselves as men who had not really thought out their own position. Often this was due not to stupidity or laziness, but to a conviction that custom and loyalty were better guides than reason, and that it would be dangerous to enquire deeply into first principles". That is of course frequently the real reason for opposition to new ideas. Yet controversy cannot proceed properly or lead to a reasonable conclusion unless the combatants base their arguments on first principles or solid achievements.

I cannot forbear quoting at this point Dr. Ralph Wardlaw's "Hints on Controversy"<sup>2</sup>. He was Congregational minister in Glasgow and was concerned in the Apocrypha controversy. He was Secretary of the Glasgow Auxiliary to the London Society. He did not agree with all that the opponents of the printing of the Apocrypha proposed, but was in any case disgusted with the way in which the matter was debated, and produced these lines, which still form a good guide to controversialists.

First, be sure that the object for which you contend  
Is worth all the time and the labour you spend,  
Since gifts are for profit and life's but a span,  
To waste them becomes not accountable man . . .  
While learning thyself at the Saviour's feet,  
O shun the dogmatical airs of conceit;  
Forget not how little the wisest can know  
In the twilight of heavenly science below;  
The high *ipse-dixit*, infallible tone,  
Is the right of the Pope and his council alone . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Anglican Attitudes*. p. 24f.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs and the Life and Writings of R.W.*, by W.L. Alexander. p. 509f.

Be yours to find truth and by truth to abide  
 Though truth should be found on your enemy's side.  
 When you quote an opponent, be candid, and fair,  
 'Tis needful the more that the virtue's so rare.  
 Disjoint not his periods to answer your end,  
 Not a word, not a syllable, alter or bend.  
 I always suspect—*latet anguis in herba*,  
 When a man does not quote my *ipsissima verba*.  
 But fill'd with the wisdom that comes from above,  
 Let truth be maintained in the kindness of love.

If one shall ask, who can satisfy these conditions? it may be pointed out that they have been satisfied many times in the past. We have already mentioned the cases of the Aberdeen Doctors and of Robert Leighton. We may add, first, that the accounts which Plato has given us of the method of Socrates, particularly perhaps in the earlier dialogues, show that, as J. A. K. Thomson has said<sup>1</sup>, he "rouths a number of charlatans or entrances his friends, in both cases with an urbanity that appears to be a new thing in controversy". Or take from a later age the case of Richard Hooker, whose *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is a classic, delightful to read even for (perhaps especially for) those who do not accept his position. J. T. McNeile wrote of him<sup>2</sup>, "The spirit of Hooker's approach, his behaviour in controversy, the moderation of his argument no less than of the position for which he argues, have permanent lessons for the Christian mind. Even if he should fail to win us to agreement with him, the reading of his pages cannot fail to put us in a frame of mind in which we shall be more disposed to agree with one another". Lastly, we may profitably refer to Cardinal Newman's 'Definition of a Gentleman.'<sup>3</sup> "If he engages in controversy of any kind, his disciplined intellect preserves him from the blundering discourtesy of better, perhaps, but less educated minds; who, like blunt weapons tear and hack instead of cutting clean, who mistake the point in argument, waste their strength on trifles, misconceive their adversary, and leave the question more involved than they found it. He may be right or wrong in his opinion, but he is too clear-headed to be unjust, he is as simple as he is forcible, and as brief as he is decisive". The whole passage is worth re-reading.

It must be admitted that many of the controversies of the past seem to "ring with a strange hollowness on the ear", as W. H. Lecky once said.<sup>4</sup> Indeed one is surprised to-day at the warmth engendered over some points in the past, which leave us pretty cold. Some of the nineteenth century

<sup>1</sup> *Classical Background of English Literature*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Books of Faith and Power*. p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> *Idea of a University*. Disc. viii. Ed. of 1921, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Qtd. Cockshot. Op. cit. p. 20.

controversies, for example, were very bitterly fought, but to-day there seems little left to fight about on those points. We may feel that there was too much pother over cases like those of Robertson Smith and Marcus Dods, but if so that is because of the complete change in the atmosphere. Then the fear and doubt and confusion were understandable. It was believed that vital issues were at stake, that truth itself was in danger of being compromised. Hence it is that we must learn to sympathise with both sides in the old controversies, even if we believe that the position of one or the other was wrong. Though the arguments may seem to us to have been over trivia, we must yet regard them as a search for the truth.

Many of the controversies however bitter then, however far removed from our sympathies to-day, have in fact led to the fuller truth known and enjoyed now. The Disruption is an example. We regret that the quarrel was so deep as to involve separation; we admire the fortitude of those who went forth, and perhaps too the courage of those who remained; but was it not because of all this that the problems debated then had to be solved and were solved, so that to-day the fragments are largely pieced together again.

Similarly with the controversies on public worship begun in Dr. Robert Lee's time. They were violent and indeed over-violent; they caused much pain and suffering in the minds of many good church-people. There is little of that particular argument to-day, though the question of 'read prayers' still causes some heart-searching. But there has been achieved a cure, if not altogether complete, yet nearly so, for the problem which started the whole thing—the lack of decency and order, the rough language and didactic character of the prayers and so on—has very largely been solved. For the very existence of the controversy led to a tremendous improvement in the conduct of public worship.

It may be then that Henry F. Henderson was right when he said<sup>1</sup> that controversy "is the means which Divine Providence employs for leading the Church into larger liberty and into the fuller possession of the truth, which is her best heritage". Controversy is not to be regarded as an end in itself, but as a search for the truth. Whether our controversies are on matters of public worship, or on Lord's Day Observance, or on the polity and government of the Church, or the relation between the Church and social and international problems, it is important, not only to conduct them in a Christian spirit, but also to believe that out of them better things must come. The will of God is not yet done among us, and the kingdoms of the world are not yet His Kingdom. But we are His servants in His Holy Church, and the Holy Spirit is leading us into a closer unity with one another, because into an ever-fuller knowledge of the truth, and into an ever-deeper fellowship with Him who is Truth.

<sup>1</sup> *Religious Controversies of Scotland*. p. 232f.